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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3852

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OES/OA FOR JFIELD, OES/OMC FOR DWARNER-KRAMER, OES/PCI FOR
ESHAW, AF/E FOR BYODER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [EWTR](#) [MOPS](#) [TZ](#)

SUBJECT: DEAD DOLPHINS ON ZANZIBAR: US NAVY IMPLICATED IN
PRESS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: More than four hundred dead dolphins have washed ashore on Zanzibar since April 27. Although the cause of death is not yet known, various theories have been put forward, including sonar from the US Navy. Post requests guidance in responding to the implication of US Navy sonar in the death of these animals, regarding both USG activities in the area and the effects of sonar on marine mammals. END SUMMARY.

Implicating the USG

¶2. (U) A May 1 article in the Guardian newspaper states "(t)here is a US Navy taskforce that operates off the coast of East Africa as part of counterterrorism operations, but the Americans have refused comment on the dolphin deaths." The article's front-page headline reads "Sonar use 'possible cause' of deaths of dolphins," and the article states that "some marine biologists are pointing to the use of sonar by the US Navy as a factor in the deaths." The article also states that "(i)n 2000, the Americans acknowledged that sonar likely contributed to the stranding of whales in the Bahamas." An April 29 report on CNN.com states that marine biologists were examining whether U.S. Navy sonar threw the animals off course.

Cause of Death

¶3. (U) The animals washing ashore are bottlenose dolphins, normally found in deeper water and not common to the area where they were found dead. Press reports state they are all adults, may not have eaten for some time and that many were bleeding in the eyes. In an April 29 Guardian newspaper article, Nariman Jidawi, a researcher at the Zanzibar-based Institute of Marine Science at the University of Dar es Salaam, cited several possible causes of death: oil pollution; eating red seaweed; or being left behind when the tide recedes. The May 1 reports added sonar and toxins from red tide as possible causes, noting "some scientists have suggested that loud bursts of sonar may disorientate or frighten ocean animals and cause them to rise to the surface too quickly," resulting in nitrogen bubbles in tissue, the equivalent of the bends. Biologists from the University of Dar es Salaam performed autopsies on some of the dolphins, but results are not yet public.

Location

¶4. (U) An April 29 article in the Guardian newspaper reported "the dead dolphins were scattered over a five kilometre stretch between Kendwa and Mkokotoni, north of Zanzibar" while the May 1 report cites a three-kilometer stretch. The beach is frequented by tourists and the opportunity to swim with the dolphins is a tourist draw for the islands. Local villagers have butchered many of the carcasses and officials advised them to bury the remains in

order to control the smell.

Comment

15. (U) COMMENT: Newspapers on Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania are following the investigation into the mysterious deaths of hundreds of dolphins off the coast of Zanzibar. Post anticipates it is only a matter of time before official comment is requested. Further, increased promotion of USG-GOT engagement regarding coastal security and marine natural resources management may be at risk. END COMMENT.
RETZER